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ABSTRACT

The results of two class surveys of students in a course addressing racism and discrimination in educational and social service systems are analyzed. The course objective was to help students develop the personal insight and analytical skills needed to synthesize information on human rights issues. The study indicated that the students were not very knowledgeable about issues affecting people culturally different from themselves. It is suggested that development of the cognitive skills necessary to improve human relations and create social change may be an abstract exercise for socially unaware students with little affective learning occurring. (JD)

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A SENSE OF HISTORY: THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL AWARENESS TO HUMAN RELATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Social awareness and cognitive skills in relation to the human relations training of classroom teachers and social service professionals were examined in this study. The study was conducted in a class on the culturally different in educational settings in the College of Education at The University of Iowa.

The results of two classroom surveys from successive years, 1978 and 1979, were discussed. The first analysis was done through group discussion processing techniques and the second was based on a paper and pencil test. The results of the process analyses were discussed. An item analysis was performed on the test and the results were presented.

The study indicated that the students were not very knowledgeable about issues affecting culturally different people. The authors concluded that the development of the cognitive skills necessary to improve human relations and create social change may be an abstract exercise for socially unaware students with little affective learning.

Introduction

"Who assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr.?" When did it happen?" "What do you remember about the day after King's assassination?" Shortly after the NBC network telecast in 1978 of "King", a story about Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, these questions were posed by the instructors in a course on the culturally different in educational settings, which is offered in the College of Education at The University of Iowa. The term culturally different refers to racial minorities and low-income educationally and economically (disadvantaged) differently advantaged people in our society. The course addresses racism and discrimination in educational and social service systems. It is designed for those preparing for teaching and social services careers. The objective is to help students develop the personal insight and analytical skills needed to synthesize information on human rights issues. The instructors seek to achieve this objective by combining the acquisition of cognitive knowledge with affective learning. The goal of the course is to motivate students to act ethically as agents for social change through increased social awareness and the application of broadened human relations skills in the classroom or social service setting.

The course is team-taught by two male instructors, one of whom is Black and the other, Jewish. The teaching method is basically through group discussions. Content for the course is drawn from educational and social science research findings, demographic data, historical facts, learning theories, current events

and civil rights legislation pertaining to the culturally different in educational settings.

Background and Profile of the Class

The results of two class surveys from successive years, 1978 and 1979, are discussed in this article. The first analysis, based on the questions posed at the beginning of this article, was conducted through group discussion in the class during the Spring Semester (April) of 1978. A paper and pencil test was developed during the Spring Semester of 1979 to assess social awareness.

	1978	1979
Number in class	45	35
Undergraduates	60%	58%
Graduates:		
Masters	30%	31%
Post Masters	10%	11%
Iowa residents	65%	70%
Non-Iowa residents	35%	30%
Males	25%	34%
Females	75%	66%
Minorities	<10%	<10%
Average ages	22	25

The 1978 Survey

The questions posed at the beginning of this article were the basis for the discussion in (April) 1978. Student attitudes were analyzed through an exploration of feelings using group processing techniques. Responses to the questions were "I don't remember," "I never read anything about King," or "I only remember the assassination of Kennedy."

While they did not have vivid recollections of either the King or Kennedy assassination, the students were more expressive about the circumstances surrounding the J. F. Kennedy assassination. Some students expressed the feeling that the assassination of J. F. Kennedy had a stronger impact on them because he was a President. During the process of examining comments about their expressed differences in feelings about the two events, facial expressions, nodding gestures, and spontaneous comments made it apparent that many individuals had specific recollections which influenced their views about the relative importance of each event. Students recalled that, "In school we talked about Kennedy's death, but when King was killed I was in high school and the only thing I remember was that there was a lot of trouble somewhere," or "My parents were very sad about Kennedy's assassination but my dad said King had it coming."

As the discussion proceeded, tension arose in the group. People began to show uneasiness with negative comments about King. They made rationalizing comments like, "I don't think that's how I felt," "I was too young to remember," or "there were no Blacks in our town so I don't know much about King." Tension in the class eased as some students realized that their impressions were often influenced by the attitudes of people around them such as their parents, teachers, and friends. There was an assertion that prejudicial attitudes were generally held by members of "the older generation." Students, however, felt their racial views were more objective. In other words, the reason the tension was abated was that many students rationalized that the negative comments were a result of outside influences and did not reflect their personal views.

To process the class reaction, students were asked to examine why their spontaneous responses reflected the views of "the older generation" rather than their own objective views? Some people became exercised and protested loudly, while others chose not to become involved in the discourse. Many of the comments were defensive, and probing questions were responded to with antagonism. Further exploration showed that many students had little understanding of the social issues of the sixties. There was a lack of intellectual curiosity among the students about why their perceptions of these two events might have some relationship to their social awareness and racial attitudes.

While these results are inconclusive, the discussion about the assassinations of J. F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., symbolizes the different levels of social awareness and the influence of individual backgrounds on racial attitude formation.

Follow-Up Survey

During the Spring Semester of 1979 after the NBC telecast of "Holocaust", a story about the extermination of Jews and others during World War II, a follow-up activity was planned to analyze students' social awareness. A more objective description of social awareness was developed as the basis for analysis and discussion in this class. A paper and pencil inventory, called a "Quick Quiz," was the instrument used. For purposes of this analysis, social awareness was defined on the basis of knowledge of significant names and events from the civil rights movement of the sixties, current social issues pertaining to educationally

and economically disadvantaged people, relevant media events, and Third World issues. Figure 1 lists the questions and the correct responses. The questions were based on the assumption that the students should be aware of the social, racial, and human rights issues addressed in the quiz.

An item analysis was performed on the quiz.* Table I represents a summary of the results. The recommended values are based on what might be expected to occur based on chance. The quiz contained 25 items consisting of eleven multiple choice, seven true or false, and seven matching questions. The actual mean for the class was 11.81, and the reliability index was .73. The reliability index was of an acceptable level above the statistically recommended .70+ level although the actual class mean was lower than the recommended mean of 16.37.

Responses to items in the topical areas were generally consistent although there was a slightly higher number of correct responses to the international Third World questions. The majority of the class (70 percent) was aware of the factors resulting from the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The question about AIM received the highest number of correct responses. However, the lowest number of correct responses (8 percent) also pertained to Native Americans. The question receiving the lowest number of correct responses was taken from the preceding (3 days earlier) Sunday's edition of the most widely circulated newspaper in the state,

*Whitney, D. R., Stewart, J. T., and Schmeiser, C. B. "Understanding and Using Item Analysis" unpublished Technical Bulletin #17 by the Evaluation and Examination Service, The University of Iowa, (Revised) 1974.

Table I

Test Statistics

No. Items Scored - 25 No. Students - 37

	Actual	Recommended
Mean	11.81	16.37
Standard Deviation	3.70	2.88
Reliability	0.73	0.70

Figure 1

Topical Areas

Significant names and events in civil rights movement:

1. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave rise to: the Coleman Report, voting rights laws, and equal rights laws.

2. Malcolm X is associated with: the Nation of Islam.

3. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on: April 4, 1968.

4. John F. Kennedy was assassinated on: November 22, 1963.

Current social issues:

5. The author of Custer Died For Your Sins is: Vine Deloria.

6. AIM stands for: American Indian Movement.

7. The Educational Amendments of 1972 contained the Title IX provisions which prohibit: discrimination against women in educational programs.

8. A land dispute over 2900 acres at Blackbird Bend involves which Indian nation: Sioux.

9. The National Urban League recently reported that the median income of black families is about $9,000 per year. True False

10. More than 25% of all black families are officially classified as poor. True False

11. Because of recent social and educational programs and affirmative action programs, almost half of all black families have reached middle class status. True False

12. The unemployment rate among black teenagers is above 40 percent. True False

13. The median income for Indian families is less than that of blacks. True False

14. Patricia Roberts Harris (Matching: HUD).

15. Benjamin Hooks (Matching: NAACP).

16. Jessie Jackson (Matching: Operation PUSH).

17. The Bakke decision pertains to: special admissions programs.

18. The median income of white families is above $16,000 per year. True False

19. Proposition 13 was passed by the U.S. Congress during the last session. True False

Figure 1 (Continued)

20. Caesar Chavez (Matching: Farm Workers Union).

Media events:

21. Alex Haley is the author of: The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

22. The Holocaust occurred: in Germany during World War II.

Third World issues:

23. The Black African name for Rhodesia (Matching: Zimbabwe).

24. Ayatollah Khomeini is exiled from (Matching: Iran).

25. Steve Biko was slain in (Matching: Johannesberg).

The Des Moines Register. Twenty-two percent of the class responded correctly to the question about equal rights for women in educational programs. It is interesting to note that women constituted about two-thirds of the class.

Two questions were related to recent television mini-series dealing with significant social issues. On the question about the "Holocaust," 86 percent of the students responded correctly. In the item analysis, the question about the author of Roots was rated as a more difficult question; only 11 percent of the class gave the correct response.

To the multiple choice question about the author of Custer Died For Your Sins, there were as many responses to what should have been an obvious incorrect foil as there were to the correct foil. The incorrect foil was the name Jay Silverheels, who played the character Tonto in "The Lone Ranger" television series.

About half as many people (32 percent) were aware of the date of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination as were aware of John F. Kennedy's (62 percent) assassination. Among the four names of minority leaders listed to be matched with their respective organizations, Caesar Chavez, who is Chicano, was recognized by substantially more people (54 percent) than the Black males, Jessie Jackson and Benjamin Hooks (27 percent) and the Black female, Patricia Roberts Harris (30 percent).

There was a series of questions about the National Urban League's annual report on The Status of Black Americans 1978, which received national coverage during January and February of 1979. Most of the class (84 percent) was aware that more than twenty-five percent of Black families are poor, and more than two-thirds (65 percent) of the class responded correctly to two

questions about the employment status of Blacks. However, only about a quarter (24 percent) of the class was aware that the median income of White families is above $16,000 annually, or that the median income of Black families is slightly less than $9,000 annually.

Discussion

The item analysis indicated a broad range of social awareness among members of the class. About a third had a higher level of awareness of the broad issues presented in the quiz. Although some correct responses to the most difficult items may have resulted from guessing, it is clear that the items with the lowest correct response rates were about current social issues and had been taken from books, newspapers, or magazines. The items that proved to be less difficult, having the highest correct response rates, tended to be from television programs. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that most students gained their information about issues related to social awareness from television. The results suggest that only a small proportion of the students had developed greater social awareness about current social issues from books, newspapers, or magazines.

An interesting example of the influence of television viewing versus reading relates to the question about the author of Custer Died For Your Sins. Most people were aware of the connection between Native Americans and the name Custer. The foils for the question listed the names of three Native Americans who have received varying degrees of media exposure. Jim Thorpe, the great Olympic athlete, was probably the most recognizable. Russell

Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement, was probably well known to most people based on the fact that the next question on the quiz was about AIM, and it received the highest correct response rate in the quiz. The other three choices were the least familiar. Clifford Wolfe, who had been written about in the newspaper several days earlier, was an unknown. Vine Deloria, the actual author, was known to some students. Some who guessed may have been vaguely familiar with the name Jay Silverheels but were not aware that he was obviously not the correct choice. They probably responded to the question based on their experiences watching television. The fact that the actor who played Tonto on "The Lone Ranger" was the response of a fifth of the class raises a question about the relationship between the level of social awareness and television viewing.

Conclusion

Neither exercise in this study provides statistically significant evidence that the students' racial attitudes were affected by their social awareness. However, the study indicated that the students were not very knowledgeable about issues affecting the culturally different. Students in these classes were preparing for positions in school systems and social services agencies. Many of them planned to work in urban settings presumably with black and other minority persons from educationally and economically different advantaged backgrounds. Development of human relations skills, to work in these and other settings, has been recognized in a number of states as important cognitive skills for future teachers. However, development of the cog-

nitive skills necessary to improve human relations and create social change may be an abstract exercise for socially unaware students with little affective learning.

The general level of social awareness may not reflect negative racial attitudes, but may be a reflection of naive apathy or conscious avoidance. The lack of social awareness could be a result of decreased media emphasis on civil rights issues. Apathy or avoidance may be a result of "benign neglect." Some may feel that these issues do not affect them directly and therefore are not significant. To the extent that people feel that these issues do not affect them directly, the differences in the levels of awareness dramatize the nature of the racial separation in our society and the need for human relations.

It is necessary to heighten social awareness among educators. Heightened social awareness coupled with the assertion that each teacher or social services professional person is a change agent is needed to develop an integrated society. Advocacy for an integrated society requires more than the abstract understanding of cognitive skills for improved interpersonal relations. It must be demonstrated through human understanding and human interaction.